

S E C R E T

DCI BRIEFING

16 May 1961

SOVIET SPACE

I. Soviet Goal

A. In 1955 the Interagency Committee for Interplanetary Communications (ICIC) announced that "interplanetary travel" was the goal of the space program of the USSR. 25X1

B. Intelligence available, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] confirms that this was--and is--a true statement.

II. Build-up

- A. As early as 1950, the decision was apparently made that the exploration of space deserved serious consideration, as it was in this year that an extensive program of vertical rocket firings began for the collection of geophysical and bio-medical information.
- B. This program involved a considerable number of firings and set the stage for the 1955 announcement.
- C. Because of greater load carrying capability available to Soviets--since 1959 they have been able to put approximately five tons in orbit--they were able to conduct a considerable number of experiments simultaneously and thus needed fewer flights than are required for the US program.
- D. The entire Soviet program relies on the basic ICBM booster thrust of 750,000 pounds, with two other upper stages which are used according to need.

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- E. We feel that they have been able to accomplish an impressive space program with only a few types of engines.

III. The importance of "Firsts"

- A. Steady technological progress has been made and the program has also been neatly tailored so that important "firsts" could be achieved. On many occasions timing could be made to coincide with international political events.
 - 1. They have by-passed many basic scientific firsts which have been garnered by the United States, in order to achieve those which could best be exploited by propaganda.
- B. It is apparent that from the very beginning the Soviets recognized the propaganda and prestige value in achieving leadership in this field. We believe, however, that while the Soviets had some awareness that space events would have some importance in the eyes of the world, even they somewhat underrated the world impact.
 - 1. It was not until the launching of Sputnik I in October 1957 that the Soviets fully realized the importance of achieving spectacular "firsts".

IV. Earth Orbit of Man

- A. The Soviets began their actual biological experiments early in the space program in vertical shots about 1950. They began prolonged biological experiments with orbiting of a dog in their Sputnik II in November 1957.

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- B. We believe, however, that the first of a series of capsules large enough to hold a man and designed to be recovered was Sputnik IV, launched in May 1960.
- C. Although the Soviet experience had been far from 100 percent successful, the launchings and recoveries of two vehicles in March 1961 apparently gave them the confidence necessary to attempt the manned shot on 12 April 1961.
- D. The launching took place at 0607 GMT on 12 April.
- E. 50 minutes later, while Gagarin was still in orbit, TASS announced to the world that a Soviet man was in earth orbit.

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- I. Propaganda for several days preceding the launching was designed to focus world attention on this event.
- J. Conflicting statements were in most cases the result of various Soviets releasing information each in accordance with his own interpretation of security requirements.

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